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Operational activities for development

Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Extension of water-related technical cooperation projects to end-beneficiaries: bridging the gap between the normative and the operational in the United Nations system (case studies in two African countries)"

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the consideration of the General Assembly, his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Extension of water-related technical cooperation projects to end-beneficiaries: bridging the gap between the normative and the operational in the United Nations system (case studies in two African countries)" (JIU/REP/2002/4) (see A/57/497).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Extension of water-related technical cooperation projects to end-beneficiaries: bridging the gap between the normative and the operational in the United Nations system (case studies in two African countries)" deals with problems encountered and opportunities available for strengthening collaboration among organizations of the United Nations system in the field of water-related technical cooperation projects. The report draws from two case studies, in Zambia and Madagascar, and draws a number of conclusions concerning the gaps that exist between activities carried out at the normative/policy level, on the one hand, and the operational activities at the field level, on the other hand, and the difficulties that this has raised in the search for synergies and complementarities to maximize benefits to end-beneficiaries.

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit has been overtaken by events, specifically by the reform of the subsidiary machinery of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination carried out in 2001, to which a number of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit were addressed. Nevertheless, the members of the Board find the report useful and informative, and appreciate the insights offered and the lessons learned from the two case studies. They also find it to be timely in view of the current international attention being given to water resources development. In considering the recommendations of the report, the members underline the wide-ranging implications of effective inter-agency coordination at the country level for the application by the concerned organizations of the United Nations system of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources.

I. Introduction

1. The report entitled "Extension of water-related technical cooperation projects to end-beneficiaries: bridging the gap between the normative and the operational in the United Nations system (case studies in two African countries)" was prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit upon a proposal submitted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1999. In making the proposal, IAEA noted that successful technical cooperation projects often ended without any broad impact on the intended beneficiaries. To ensure a more focused approach for the report, two technical cooperation projects in the area of freshwater resources in Zambia and Madagascar are selected by the Joint Inspection Unit as case studies.

2. The report dwells on problems encountered as well as opportunities for strengthening collaboration among the concerned organizations of the United Nations system in the field of water resources development. Drawing from the two case studies, the report identifies the gaps that exist between the normative activities carried out at the policy level and the operational activities at the field level, and highlights the impact of those gaps on the search for synergies and complementarities to maximize benefits to end-beneficiaries. The report also reviews the work of the former Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) as task manager for chapter 18 of Agenda 21 on coordination at the country level of the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system concerning integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources.

3. While the report of the Joint Inspection Unit was being completed, the review of the subsidiary bodies in the programme area was also being finalized by the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). As a result, a number of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit contained in the report appear to have been overtaken by events, as they were made on the basis of the Unit's findings concerning the subsidiary mechanisms of the former ACC, which have now been discontinued pursuant to the decision of CEB of October 2001.

II. General comments

4. The members of CEB appreciate the work that has been done by the Joint Inspection Unit on the important issue of water resources management, an issue that has gained considerable prominence within the global development agenda and is drawing ever-increasing attention. The growing concern over water resources management is manifested in the linkage between water-related issues and the Millennium Development Goals, and in the higher priority being accorded to water resources development in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, under the objective of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (Plan of Implementation, para. 25).[1] Greater attention is being paid to freshwater issues, in particular as they relate to sanitation, health and agricultural productivity, three of the five areas

[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

addressed by the Summit. In the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), new regional intergovernmental mechanisms and technical advisory bodies have emerged, such as the African Ministerial Conference on Water, the African Water Task Force and the African Water Facility.

5. The members of CEB note that the report addresses the issue of inter-agency coordination on water-related technical cooperation projects in two ways: (a) through alternative arrangements for a successor mechanism to the former ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources (recommendations 1 to 5); and (b) through new modalities or instruments for enhanced cooperation in the field of water resources at the country level, mostly under the auspices of the United Nations resident coordinator (recommendations 6 to 10).

6. With regard to the first group of recommendations, the members of CEB recall that the issue of reform of the ACC subsidiary bodies referred to in paragraph (d) of the conclusions set out in the Joint Inspection Unit report was discussed at the second regular session of CEB in 2001 (19 and 20 October). During that session, ACC decided (see ACC/2001/5) to move away from the concept of permanent subsidiary bodies with fixed periodicity of meetings and rigid reporting requirements and, instead, to rely increasingly on ad hoc, time-bound and task-oriented coordination arrangements. At the same time, ACC recognized the need for a number of inter-agency bodies to pursue their coordination work as expert bodies rather than as subsidiaries of ACC. Pursuant to that decision, all of the ACC subcommittees, including the Subcommittee on Water Resources, have been formally discontinued.

7. In discussing the follow-up arrangements to water and sanitation in the framework of the World Summit on Sustainable Development at the CEB session on 25 and 26 April 2003 in Paris, Board members point out that the intergovernmental agenda is very extensive in this area and that, globally, there are many collaborative and advocacy arrangements that need to be harnessed. They observe that, while there is good collaboration in relation to monitoring and assessment within the United Nations system, more intensive and better-coordinated action is called for with respect to integrated water management and development. In this particular field, activities and mandates are widespread throughout the system, and there is a clear need for an institutional focal point within the United Nations system to steer follow-up actions and interactions with other partners. In this regard, CEB members note that extensive work on follow-up arrangements to water and sanitation is under way in the system in the framework of the Summit. This includes substantial work related to monitoring and assessment, such as the World Water Assessment Programme as well as activities in such areas as integrated water development and management. CEB members are of the view that mechanisms for inter-agency coordination in the area of freshwater are essential for achieving coherence and consistency in the activities of the United Nations system, and that consultations should be pursued on the most effective functioning of the inter-agency network of experts operating in this area and related collaborative arrangements.

8. With regard to the second set of recommendations (6-10), CEB members recall that, at the spring session in Rome in April 2002, they agreed on the need for continued inter-agency coordination at the working level in areas of system-wide concern, particularly freshwater, which are crucial for development and for which several agencies share responsibility. In this regard, they point out that such

coordination is usually most fruitful taking place through discussion with national authorities under the auspices of the United Nations resident coordinator. In addition, they stress that, as water-related technical cooperation projects necessarily involve many economic sectors and national agencies, the risk of fragmentation is often considerable. That risk is taken fully into account by the system when launching joint activities and other inter-agency cooperation. Problems of coordination do arise in this regard, and often they mirror the entrenched and rigid institutional arrangements at the national and sub-national levels. CEB members are fully aware that while the concerned organizations of the system carry out much of the normative work with respect to water resources development in full coordination with each other at the policy level, there is often reluctance at the country level to coordinate water investment and management. These realities have to be taken into account.

9. CEB members recognize that the impact of water-related technical cooperation projects on specific concerns of the beneficiaries, for example, the downstream improvements in the water supply, sanitation, hygiene and eventually health aspects of the communities affected, is influenced by the degree to which those downstream developments are integrated into the overall scheme by design, or followed up at the country level under the "handover" phase of the completed project. They point out, however, that the overall designs as well as the post-project implementation phases are sometimes compromised, owing to the limits imposed by the budgets, time and staff of both the organizations of the system involved in project implementation and the national authorities responsible for the project.

III. Comments on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should request the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources to establish a database of the water-related technical cooperation projects executed or funded by the United Nations organizations. The database, which could be classified both thematically and geographically, should be maintained and continuously updated by the Subcommittee secretariat. It should contain, inter alia, information about the objectives, nature and activities of the posted projects, the region of intervention in the recipient country, and the targeted end-beneficiaries.

10. With respect to this recommendation as well as recommendation 3 below, CEB members note that various web sites of concerned organizations of the system have been developed, expanded and maintained over the years and offer adequate detailed information concerning water-related technical cooperation projects and other data. The development of these web sites and their networking within the system serve, among other things, the purpose of making information widely available to support and facilitate inter-agency coordination. Consequently, therefore, CEB members are not convinced of the need to establish, or the value that can be added by, a special database, or special web site, of water-related technical cooperation projects implemented by the United Nations system. They further observe that to successfully establish such a database or web site all sorts of joint and inter-agency arrangements for data collection, sharing and updating would be required that may

prove to be unsupportable or too costly in the long run, or even duplicative of the work needed to maintain the various web sites mentioned above.

Recommendation 2

CEB should request the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, through a joint arrangement among its members, to elaborate common and comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of the United Nations development and management projects in the water sector. The guidelines should incorporate, to the extent possible, the intersectoral aspects of the water projects with the aim of fostering inter-agency collaboration at the country level. They should also ensure, inter alia, that the relevant objectives and activities included in Agenda 21 are well observed throughout the overall cycle of the water projects.

11. CEB members note that this recommendation has been overtaken by events following the decision to discontinue the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources as part of the reform of the subsidiary machinery of CEB. At the present time, there are ongoing consultations in CEB on developing new, more dynamic and innovative approaches to coordination in the area of water resources development. Be that as it may, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit acknowledges that extensive guidelines concerning the management of the water sector have already been published by the organizations of the system. CEB members therefore question the need for, and the feasibility of, setting up joint and comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of water-related projects. In their view, assuming that such a comprehensive compilation of guidelines could be put together, it is likely that it would be too bulky and too difficult to be of any practical value to national authorities.

Recommendation 3

CEB should request the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources to proceed with the establishment of its web site. The web site should, inter alia, provide substantive information about the meetings of the Subcommittee and the decisions taken there, and provide linkages to the database and the guidelines called for in recommendations 1 and 2 above. It should also provide a means of sharing the experiences, lessons learned and best practices, as well as collaborative and complementary activities, in the water-related projects executed by the United Nations organizations and/or other donors.

12. The comments of CEB members in respect of recommendation 1 also apply to this recommendation.

Recommendation 4

CEB should request the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources to devote part of its sessions to operational issues, including early promotion and advocacy of new programmes/projects in order to allow better synergies and complementarities in the design phase; discussion of specific operational problems involving several United Nations organizations at the country level; discussion of policy or operational issues raised to the Subcommittee by some of those operational United Nations water committees called for in recommendation 7 below; discussion and follow-up on joint programmes/ projects emanating from the Subcommittee; and discussion of joint

interventions in case of emergencies or major problems in the water sector in certain countries. Owing to the limited resources allocated by the organizations to their participation in the Subcommittee meetings, CEB should encourage the Subcommittee to resort to a wider use of modern communication technology to bring on board the technical advisers involved in the operational issues under discussion during that portion of the sessions.

13. CEB members note that, irrespective of whatever inter-agency coordination arrangement may be agreed upon in the water resources development sector, the list of tasks to be undertaken under that future arrangement appears to be too broad and unrealistic to be feasible. CEB members point out in this regard that the most effective form of coordination takes place at the country level within the framework of specific developmental needs and in response to the requests of national authorities.

Recommendation 5

CEB should proceed to enhance the resources and technical capacity of the secretariat of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, including through the provision of one or two full-time Professional posts. The(se) post(s) should be filled by candidates having technical expertise in the area of water resources and information technology in order to enable the Subcommittee secretariat to discharge more efficiently its mandated functions and to allow it to undertake new activities such as those described in recommendations 1 to 4. Funding for these posts could be provided either through an agreed jointly financed arrangement among CEB members participating in the Subcommittee, or sought externally.

14. CEB members note that this recommendation is no longer relevant as the former ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources has been discontinued.

Recommendation 6

The General Assembly may wish to request, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that the United Nations resident coordinators enhance and complement the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) exercise with an "operational UNDAF" process in which the United Nations organizations, working at the country level in general and in the water sector in particular, would, to the extent possible and within their respective mandates, orient their programmes/projects in the recipient country towards integrated interventions where the elements of synergies and complementarities are perceived in the design phase of joint programmes and projects. The Assembly may also wish to recommend, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that such integrated interventions be initiated in common selected zones in need within the country and used as pilot programmes/projects, to be extended at the national level through the national and local authorities and with the assistance of other donors.

15. CEB members express reservations about this recommendation. While they appreciate the importance of orienting the programmes and projects of the organizations of the system towards integrated interventions in recipient countries where there are clear synergies and complementarities to be achieved, doing so

through a new planning and coordinating instrument may not be the best approach in the present environment. CEB members are of the view that launching a new "operational UNDAF" would increase the already heavy burden imposed on national Governments given the present array of country assessment, planning and monitoring instruments such as the common country assessment, the poverty reduction strategy paper, UNDAF, etc. In their view, if the "operational UNDAF" were introduced under the present circumstances it would probably be seen as merely an additional layer in the coordination efforts. Apart from this and the related timing issue, CEB members are not convinced, for a number of other reasons, that this approach could substantially improve the present process of coordination between normative decision-making and country-level actions, or facilitate coordination at the country level for water-related technical cooperation projects. CEB members believe, first, that, while joint planning and programming may enhance the chances of achieving complementarities and synergies, it would not necessarily ensure an effective link between normative planning and decision-making at the inter-agency level, on the one hand, and the actions taken by various actors at the field level, on the other hand. Secondly, the willingness to coordinate actions at the field level is often hampered by a number of other factors, largely environmental and/or political, that could not easily be factored into joint planning and programming exercises.

Recommendation 7

In conjunction with recommendation 6 above, and as a means of concretizing it in the water sector, the General Assembly may wish to request, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that the United Nations resident coordinators establish, as appropriate, operational water committees with the participation of the United Nations organizations involved in water-related projects in the country, represented by their senior water expert(s) at the country office. The Assembly may also wish to recommend, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that such committees be entrusted, inter alia, with the following functions: to enhance coordination/collaboration and exchange of experiences among its members; to explore the potential for synergies and complementarities among their country programmes/projects; to elaborate coordinated and concerted United Nations approaches towards the relevant national authorities, as well as towards the donors and other non-United Nations actors involved in the water sector in the country; to implement and oversee other inter-agency activities at the country level, including those contained in recommendations 8 to 10; to work as an interlocutor of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources as and when needed, and to disseminate and discuss the means to implement the relevant decisions of the latter, as appropriate.

16. CEB members take the view that this recommendation should be evaluated only after a decision has been taken regarding the appropriate inter-agency coordination arrangement to be established for the water resources development sector in the United Nations system, and in the light of how the said future coordination arrangement may be able to provide the necessary linkage between normative decision-making at the global level and the actions taken at the country

level that ensures positive impact on beneficiaries in the field of water-related development.

Recommendation 8

The General Assembly may wish to request, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that the United Nations resident coordinators ensure that the United Nations organizations involved in water-related projects would, where appropriate, harmonize their participatory approaches and information, education and communication techniques in the field, and that the operational water committees called for in recommendation 7 above would facilitate and oversee such efforts, including through the exchange of information and experiences among its members and by holding seminars or other forums of interaction with non-United Nations actors serving the same or similar communities.

17. CEB members note that efforts to harmonize participatory approaches in water-related technical cooperation projects are already being made by concerned organizations of the system.

Recommendation 9

The General Assembly may wish to request, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that the United Nations resident coordinators ensure that a follow-up is conducted by the United Nations organizations to their pilot programmes/projects extended at the national level, including to the pilot integrated interventions advocated in recommendation 6 above, and that such follow-ups are conducted in collaboration with the national authorities at reasonable intervals and that their results are used to enhance and consolidate the relevant national and local capacities. The Assembly, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, may wish to invite donors who support the extension process to consider providing funding for that purpose.

18. This recommendation is acceptable in principle, considering that extensive monitoring and evaluation systems already exist for projects being implemented by the organizations of the United Nations system, and that these should be able to accommodate the extra focus on ensuring feedback to concerned national authorities in charge of water-related technical cooperation projects.

Recommendation 10

The General Assembly may wish to request, through the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, that the United Nations resident coordinators, in consultation with the operational water committees called for in recommendation 7 above, ensure the optimal use of the experiences and resources of the latters' member organizations at the country level through an appropriate coordinated division of labour that should take into account the comparative advantages of each organization, in particular in supporting the strategic tasks of institution-building and elaborating sustainable national policies.

19. CEB members generally accept this recommendation considering that the comparative advantage offered by the individual organizations of the United Nations system is well known to national authorities. However, the exploitation of such comparative advantage would depend on the specific competencies and experience that each of the concerned organizations of the system can readily make available in specific locations.